

Needed: A China policy that makes sense

Wong Tsen, the soft-spoken lathe operator who was Edward Behr's host during his visit to Communist China (p. 21), typifies both the tragedy and the opportunity of America's relations with China. Wong is in many ways similar to most Americans—engrossed in the welfare of his wife and four children, and in getting ahead in his job. He is a kindly and gentle man, but when he hears a one-sided Communist account of American military action in the Gulf of Tonkin, he is filled with hatred. Once he has performed symbolic verbal gestures against the United States, however, he is relieved to scamper back to his own personal preoccupations. He would be a man of goodwill, if any goodwill were permitted by Mao Tse-tung's own implacable hatred of America.

It would matter enough for concern if 700 million people were being systematically taught to hate America—that and no more. Now, however, the paranoid leaders of Communist China have an atomic bomb, crude though it may be. It may take them five years, or even 10, to develop a workable weapons system to deliver the bomb. But we can take little solace from this fact. The Chinese bomb may not have altered the world's balance of terror for the moment; nevertheless, nothing in world affairs will ever again be quite the same. The fateful clock which appears on the cover of the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*—the hands showing five minutes to midnight—is now ticking inexorably closer to possible world disaster.

This period of grace, whether five or 10 years, must not be wasted. The U.S. can no longer postpone the scrapping of that patchwork crazy quilt—full of internal contradictions—which is misnamed a "China policy." We must replace it with a coherent policy worked out by the coolest and ablest brains at our command. We can no longer afford to drift, for time is running out. Unless Communist China can be brought within the framework of a dependable system of international guarantees—of arms control, nuclear test bans, inspection, and so on—the world may face a new kind of aggressive Hitlerism, its madness reinforced a million times by nuclear power.

It is possible, of course, and devoutly to be hoped, that the achievement of even a crude atomic weapon will bring to Communist China—as it has already brought to the U.S. and the Soviet Union—a sobering sense of responsibility. It is paradoxical but true that Communist China, without atomic weapons, could take greater risks of major war than either the U.S. or the Soviets—knowing that both these powers were restrained by this very sense of nuclear responsibility. China now loses this curious immunity, for the sense of dwindling time will make both the U.S. and the Soviets more inclined to risk a showdown with China now.

The time is here when all these contingencies must be clearly faced, when we must prepare a policy that is both tough enough and flexible enough to anticipate events rather than greet them with surprise.

No one can prescribe what the precise details of our China policy should be. To be sensible and coherent, however, it must face these broad necessities:

- It must decide, once and for all, that Chiang Kai-shek's government cannot continue to claim to be the government of mainland China, which none of his officials has even seen for 15 years. Instead of maintaining this legal myth—rather like the Count of Paris's claim to being the King of France—we should concentrate on protecting the freedom and self-determination of Chiang's stronghold, Formosa. That land must not under any circumstances be handed over to Red China.
- It must abandon the folly of trying to keep China's 700 million people perpetually isolated from the normal avenues of trade and diplomatic interchange. We should be prepared, at the first sign of decreased belligerence and hostility on China's part, to meet it halfway with offers to assist its internal development with trade and technical cooperation. The more we can engage China in long-range international obligations, the less likely it would be to run amok.
- It should make an imaginative effort to lift the existing disputes between China and the U.S. onto a higher and different level, which would acknowledge China's right to be regarded, and treated, as the great nation it has always been. While fearing its development of nuclear rockets, we must remember that China invented rockets in the first place—and paper and printing as well, for the Chinese proudly remember that they were highly cultured when the West was barbarian. We might consider such imaginative gestures, for example, as inviting China to join with the other great powers in the exploration of outer space. We must try, in every honorable way, to break through Mao's hatred, to reach the Wong Tsens and the younger leaders of the China yet to be.
- At the same time we must be prepared for a showdown if the Chinese leaders show increasing signs of preparing for war, and inciting their peoples to readiness for war—if, in short, they clearly move in the direction of neo-Hitlerism. We must not repeat the Anglo-French failure to stop Hitler when there was yet time. We must be prepared, regardless of possible Soviet intervention or United Nations condemnation, to knock out China's nuclear capability by pinpoint-bombing its reactors and arsenals before its power becomes indestructible. Terrible as this alternative is, we must not exclude it from our planning, or fail to warn the Chinese that we do soberly include it. To do otherwise would place America's own survival in jeopardy.

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